



Driving Tour of Luther Township

Have a Grand Time in Luther!

Welcome to East Luther - Grand Valley, Dufferin's newest municipality, and arguably, one of the most diverse; certainly one of the most modified.

East Luther – Grand Valley is the result of the amalgamation of the Village of Grand Valley and the Township of East Luther in 1999. Grand Valley had been a separate municipality from its incorporation as Dufferin's second village in 1897. One hundred years later, provincial pressure for municipal amalgamations and environmental and economic pressure for better water and sewage facilities led to a re-joining of the neighbours.

Our driving tour of the township starts on the East-West Luther townline and Concession 2-3 at the South Luther School and Community Centre. (see the map on the last page for location).

Enjoy the tour!

STARTING POINT—SOUTH LUTHER SCHOOL AND COMMUNITY CENTRE

Depart South Luther School, head east on Concession 2-3 for 1.3 km.

Stop #1 South Luther School and Community Centre

South Luther was the 2nd school section set up in Luther township indicating that this was one of the earliest settled parts of the township. The first settlers arrived in 1856. The community of "South Luther" was disrupted by the division of Luther township in 1881 leaving the school in West Luther and the church in East Luther. Nevertheless, South Luther retained a strong sense of its own identity. When the school closed in 1964, local residents from both sides of the county line got together and bought it to use as a community hall. The building has been refurbished and re-opened for community use.



South Luther School, 2012

Stop #2: South Luther Cemetery

South Luther Cemetery is tucked among the trees on the hillside. The first burial, infant George Todd, was made in 1861. It was the only cemetery between Grand Valley and Arthur. It was non-denominational. A cairn marks the site of Ebenezer Presbyterian Church, organized by Methodist minister Joseph Hilts who was the first to minister to the Presbyterian settlers here. The church was built in 1864 and was in use until 1967, when it was closed and removed.



Ebenezer Presbyterian Church

Proceed east on Concession 2-3 to 2nd intersection. Turn left on to 24-25 Sideroad, heading north



Robson boys clearing and ditching, 1893

As you travel up 24-25 sideroad, enjoy the views of the farms on the east side, and keep an eye open for an original log house being reconstructed. On the left you will see maturing reforestation plantings on land owned by the Grand River Conservation Authority.

Cross over Concession 4-5

You will notice several man-made drainage ditches along the way, dug in an effort to bring more land into agricultural production. The first drainage act in Ontario was introduced in 1883, and municipalities across the province quickly took advantage of the provincial subsidies offered. There was a marked increase in the amount of arable land in the province.

At Stop Sign, Concession 6-7, turn left.

Heading west on Concession 6-7 you will soon see some significant dairy farms with arrays of barns: Brakke Farm, and Bryhome Farm, on the right and Swiss Bell Farms on the left. While the Holstein is the staple breed for dairy farmers in Dufferin, Swiss Bell specializes in Jerseys. Despite its marshy reputation, East Luther contains a number of prosperous farms



Swiss Bell Jersey Farm

At the Dead End, turn right on 21-22 Sideroad.

Stop #3: Luther Marsh Conservation Area

Concession 6-7 now dead ends at the boundary of the Luther Marsh Conservation Area. It once continued west to several more farmsteads, many now underwater. Heading north, you pass the Luther Marsh Education Centre on the left.



Continue north. past Concession 8-9 on your right. On your left, watch for the sign Luther Marsh Wildlife Management Area. Turn left into parking area

Effective March 23, all Grand River Parks will be closed to visitors in response to the Covid-19 virus - Enjoy the history and then follow directions to the next stop.



Refilling the Luther Reservoir ca. 1955

This is an access point for the Luther Lake wildlife observation area. Off to your right as you face the lake, is the dam built in 1951 across Black Creek that created Luther Lake. The lake was created to help control water levels on the Grand River system – to prevent extreme spring flooding downstream and to ensure a flow during the summer. To your left is an observation tower you can climb for a broad view of the extensive lake. Watch for all sorts of waterfowl, particularly Canada geese nesting near by and rearing their goslings. About 1/3 of East Luther township's area is controlled by the Grand River Conservation Authority.

Continue here — Out of parking lot, turn left, continue north on Sideroad 21-22

On the right, #35001 was the former Monticello school , now a private residence. This was the main school for the area drawing children from the Village of Monticello and the surrounding farms.



Monticello School, 1908

Continue to the stop sign in Monticello:

Stop #4 Monticello

Ahead on the right is the former General Store. Ahead on the left was first general store and Monticello post office.

On your left was the Switzer home, site of the Monticello telephone exchange run by Mary Switzer for more than 40 years



Turn left on County Road 15.

As you head west, you will see on your left the Monticello Wet Lands – a wildlife management project of Ducks Unlimited on GRCA lands. You will also notice several driveways and tree plantings that mark former home sites and farmsteads. It reminds us of the impact the Grand River water management project has had on the local community.



Luther Lake

At the first intersection, turn right: on to East-West Luther Townline.

East-West Luther Townline Be not dismayed! Just go slow.

The road is narrow, but solid. Enjoy the idea of slipping back in time to what “might have been.” Not only is this the township boundary, but the westernmost boundary of the County of Dufferin.

Proceed north to the stop sign at Concession 12-13.

The mass of towers and overhead wires stretching out before you is the Bruce – Milton power corridor. The capacity has been doubled by the construction of the parallel line during past couple of years, including the construction of the access road. The corridor cuts a significant swath across East Luther and neighbouring East Garafraxa.

Turn right on to Concession 12-13, and head east.

Stop #5 Erasmus/Wesley

The trees and the buildings on right mark the site of particular interest to local philatelists. The red brick building was the Erasmus Post Office, opened in 1895. In 1903, the name was changed to Wesley, making the “Erasmus” post office one of the most rare in Dufferin. Post office service continued until 1919 when the service switched to rural mail delivery. Mr. George Wood, who lived here and was post master, was a renowned beekeeper with a province-wide reputation



Wesley School

At the first intersection, turn left, drive north on Sideroad 21-22

The farm on the left is the home of Susan and Russell Simpson. Russell is a popular fencing contractor, and his work spreads along the property lines of Dufferin county. Tucked in the trees is Wesley School – SS No 9, East Luther - the other part of this community with two distinctive names.

Continue north to Hwy. 89. Turn right.

The farm on the left, north side of the Highway, is called Poverty Acres, which speaks volumes. Note the hogsback behind the barn. This distinctive topographical feature didn't yield productive farm land.

Stop #6 Keldon

Slow down for the remnants of the village of Keldon which was once a lumber town. In the late 19th century when the land was being cleared, there was enough water in the Grand at this point that logs could be driven downstream to rail shipping points in Fergus and Elora. There are newspaper reports to verify the story, but stories of log drives and rafts of logs are easier to imagine at the other end of the township where the river is deeper and wider. The "frontier" worked its way north through Luther from 1860 to 1885. The little building by the bridge was once Keldon General Store.

Bridge on Highway 89 over the Grand River: from here south we will follow the river (more or less, as roads allow)

Ahead on right, watch for a red brick church building. Turn right at the church (27-28 Sideroad)

The red brick building on the corner was Gandier United Church which recently closed. The congregation dates from 1881 when student minister Alfred Gandier organized a Presbyterian congregation here. The stone over the door indicates this building was erected in 1916.



Gandier Church

Drive south on 27-28 Sideroad

The first bridge crosses a branch of the Grand that comes out of Melancthon township. You will see lots of farm fields but not many farm buildings due to the consolidation of farm holdings, and cash crop agriculture in this area. The red brick building on the left was known as Keldon School.

Cross Concession Road 12-13 and continue south.

Cross another bridge, this one over another tributary of the Grand that comes out of Amaranth township adding its flow to the upper Grand.

Continue to village of Colbeck, at the stop sign.

Stop #7 Colbeck

The village of Colbeck was named after the Colbeck family who settled here in 1860. The post office opened in 1869, and for the first 40 years, the postmaster was a member of the Colbeck family. The post office closed in 1949. Colbeck is at the heart of a prosperous farming community. Ahead on left was St. Clement's Anglican Church which opened in 1884. It closed in 1953, and was sold to Colbeck-Monticello WI for use as a community hall. Colbeck is one of the twin communities of Colbeck – Monticello, both on Concession 10 – 11, now County Road 15.



Colbeck Ladies taking tea ca. 1890



SS#5 East Luther (Colbeck), ca. 1900



St Clement's Anglican Church

Turn right on County Road 15.

Head west, across the main stream of the Grand River again. Here you will find another series of large dairy farms, Simonhof farms and the farms of the Oosterhof family. Further west there are a number of extensive sheep farms, too.

At first intersection, turn left on to Sideroad 24. Drive south crossing over the Monticello Tributary of the Grand River.

At Concession 8-9, turn left (on to pavement). Drive east. Over yet another bridge: this one crosses Black Creek that drains Luther Lake.

Approaching the stop sign:

Stop #8 Tarbert

The stone house on the left was the site of the Legate Post Office. It opened in 1902 and closed in 1912, another post mark collector's challenge. The original tent roof on the house was recently replaced by a raised attic. On the right, the new home replaced the Tarbert school that was destroyed by fire.



At the stop sign, the Grand River is before you, and another of the complex road and river intersections that road builders have had to deal with in East Luther.

Turn right on to 27 Sideroad. Drive south.

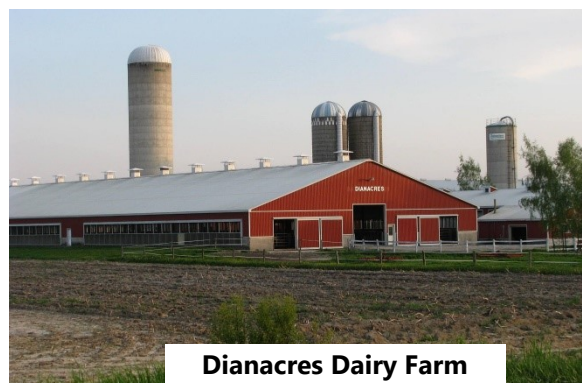
Further along, on your right, a building in a planting of trees was Tarbert United Church which closed in 1964. It was one of a pair of churches here: one Methodist (right) and one Presbyterian (left), that were virtually identical. After the creation of the United Church of Canada, the Methodist church sat empty, and its twin became the United Church.



Tarbert Methodist and Presbyterian Churches

At the next intersection, turn left on Concession 6-7.

On the right is Dianacres dairy farm – and it may look familiar. It has appeared in some television commercials. Ahead on left is the Landman farm. Eric Landman is the builder of the dry stone walls at the Museum of Dufferin.



Dianacres Dairy Farm

At stop sign: Newson's school on your left, and the White Bridge on the Grand River, another complex intersection

Turn left over bridge, and immediately right onto Concession 6 again.

Stop #8 Grand River



Upper Grand River

On your left is a lane. Pull over and get out to enjoy the view down the river from the old bridge piers. Just to the north you will notice some recently erected wind turbines here too.

Continue east on Concession 6, up the hill to the East Luther – Amaranth Town Line. Turn right. South on Town Line. Some more farming country: farm fields and drains.

At intersection with County Road 10, turn right, and follow the paved road as it curves around to the west.

On your right is the magnificent Mazenauer dairy farm one of the largest barn complexes in the township.



Mazenauer Dairy Farm

Down hill to stop sign at County Road 25. Here is the Black Bridge, newly rebuilt, and another complex road and river intersection.

Turn left on Cty Rd 25 and follow it south along the Grand River to Grand Valley. In Grand Valley, NOTE: the posted speed is 40 km / hour

Follow Main Street south, past Amaranth Street. Ahead on the left, is the Royal Bank and the Valley Inn. Turn left.

Drive east two short blocks. You get a great view of the river and the old Grand Valley swimming hole by the former fire hall.



Swimming Hole, Grand Valley, ca 1950

At the end of the street, turn left and drive north to Amaranth Street



Trinity United Church before and After the Tornado

As you head north, you will pass the new United Church. The former church building was wrecked in the tornado of May 31, 1985.

At Amaranth Street, turn right



Tornado damage on Amaranth street 1985

That same tornado danced down Amaranth street and wrecked nearly every building, bur erratically missing a couple of older homes. The street has been rebuilt, and the trees are starting to assume a bit of size 27 years after the event.

The new Amaranth Street bridge replaced an older concrete "bow string" structure. The bridge offers nice views of the Grand River.

The building of Amaranth Street Bridge



Over the Grand River up hill to stop sign. Turn left, follow pavement as it curves to the east.

You are now in Amaranth township. Stay on the paved road.

At the first intersection, turn right (on paved road). Follow paved road, along Grand River south into Waldemar.

Enjoy the scenery of the countryside and the river. Past the Riverside Assembly, on left watch for the cement piers of old railway bridge and Station Street. This used to be a great spot to paddle in the river – it has a smooth riverstone bottom here.

Continue south through village to Cty Rd. 109. Turn left – 14 km to Orangeville.

The Museum of Dufferin hope you have enjoyed your tour of the Luther Lake township, and come back to explore other roads in East Luther.

East Luther... A Little History



Luther Council 1873-74

East Luther was Dufferin's youngest township. It seceded from the County of Wellington and joined the County of Dufferin in 1883 when only two years old. The former Township of Luther had divided in 1881, partly due to its large size, and partly due to geography – there were two communities of interest in Luther – east and west of the great swamp in its middle.

In some ways, the Township of East Luther was at odds with most of the rest of Dufferin. While most of the townships of Dufferin are surveyed in 1000 acre blocks, East Luther is surveyed in 600 acre blocks. In most of Dufferin, the concessions run north and south, in Luther they run east and west. This change is explained by the dates of the initial survey of the township. Most of Dufferin was surveyed in the 1820s and laid out in 200 acre lots in 1000 acre blocks surrounded by roads.

The survey of Luther wasn't completed until 1854, and it was surveyed in the fashion of the newly opened Queen's Bush – still 200 acre lots, but in 1200 acre blocks with a road laid out every two concessions. In Luther, the Concession are numbered 1 to 14 from south to north and the sideroads, which run after every three lots, are numbered from west to east,

When the township was divided, 18 Sideroad became the East – West Luther Townline. Since 1999, the Township of West Luther has been part of the new Township of Wellington North.

The earliest areas of settlement in East Luther township were around what is now Grand Valley, a settlement to the north near the Sixth Line that became known as Tarbert, and a settlement around the Second line and 18 Sideroad that became known as South Luther.

In the early days of settlement, South Luther was the gateway to East Luther. Many settlers coming to the township followed the Grand River, then cut north from Belwood to Hereward and thence into Luther. The first permanent settlers arrived in the mid-1850s, taking up land in the southern and eastern part of the townships on the best available land. And they discovered some terrific farmland, here on part of the Dundalk till plain, as you will see as drive through the township. There are thriving large consolidated farms that rival any in Ontario.

And then there is the rest of the geography. Throughout its history, East Luther has been defined by two major features: the Grand River and the Luther Marsh. The character of the river changes nota-

bly in its trip through East Luther township. At the north end, it is more like a stream and tributaries. But as those tributaries contribute their waters, by mid-township it is decidedly a river, and by the time it loops through Grand Valley, it is recognizable as one of Ontario's great rivers.

The Luther Marsh sprawls across mid-Luther, East and West. Its muck and mire was supposedly what gave the township its name. The survey of the township was started in 1837 by Lewis Burwell and abandoned. In 1854, George Phillips was commissioned to try again. According to local legend, Phillips was a Catholic, and after spending nearly two years struggling through the swamps and mires of the place, he named it "Luther" after the biggest heretic he knew.

By the 1880s, support for public drainage works across Ontario allowed farmers to start encroaching on former marsh lands. And in East Luther, this meant, farmers started to clear, drain and occupy land on the edge of the great marsh. By the 1930s, the mismanagement of water resources in the Grand River watershed had become critical. Severe spring floods in the cities and towns downstream were frequent occurrences. Summer droughts made it impossible for effluent to discharge. In 1937, a major report proposed dams and reservoirs on the upper Grand at Luther, Waldemar and Elora to manage the flow of water in the river. In 1938, the federal and provincial governments agreed to share equally 75 per cent of the project, with the balance being paid by the Grand River Conservation Commission.

It didn't all happen quite as originally proposed. The dam at Waldemar got moved down stream to Shand's, near Fergus, and created Belwood Lake. The Elora dam wasn't built, but one on the Conestoga near Drayton created Lake Conestoga. But a dam on the Black Creek in Luther turned the marsh into a reservoir and Luther Lake was born in 1952. The Grand River Conservation Authority now controls 15,000 acres in East and West Luther, including several former productive farms, as well as a number of marginal ones. More recently, the Monticello Wetlands project has expanded the wildlife management activities. Approximately a third of East Luther is conservation land.

The resulting dislocation had widespread effects on the township. Several families left and villages and hamlets dwindled. As you tour alongside the conservation and marsh lands, you will note the sites of several former farmsteads (watch for driveways and tree plantings and foundation remnants) where families once made a living.

This driving tour takes you on a tour starting at South Luther, one of the oldest settlements in the township, north along the marshlands and conservation area, then back south along the Grand River as it makes its way from Keldon down to Grand Valley and Waldemar. There are a few little detours along the way to look at some of the significant farms that continue to bring prosperity to the township.

Tour Map

